

NAZI AND NAZARENE

By

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THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

has known persecution in many countries at many periods of the world's history, but the persecution she has suffered in Germany since Hitler came to power has a character all its own. For the Nazis have not attacked the Church for what are claimed to be her failings but for what are known to be her virtues: she is persecuted not because she is Roman Catholic but because she is Christian.

That is the conclusion reached by Monsignor Knox in this pamphlet. No fine fury of anti-clericalism can be discovered in the Nazi assault; only a carefully calculated will-to-power over the minds of men. Monsignor Knox shows how the same technique of aggression is used to attack the Church as to conquer a neutral country: the technique of blandishment and threats, of lying propaganda, even of the Fifth Column, for there are in any Church men of peace who, rather than break finally with the persecutor, are ready to sell the pass, slope by slope, in the vain expectation of appeasement. In conclusion Monsignor Knox describes how in the German-occupied territories the mask of moderation is removed, and the Nazi purpose can be seen for what it is, the eradication of Christianity altogether.

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MOST of us, in youth, have greeted with impatient ridicule the argument that such and such a thing is the thin end of the wedge. Most of us, as part of the little wisdom we garner during life, are driven to the conclusion that there was something in it after all. And the short history of Nazi Germany might be represented by a surrealist picture consisting entirely of wedges; not, indeed, that the thin ends of them are very thin—the angle is often one of sixty degrees; but that has been the method of the Third Reich, and it has not failed yet. You see it in Hitler's rise to power, first figuring as the leader of a constitutional party, then allying himself with Hugenberg's Nationalists in order to secure a working majority, then playing the cuckoo in the Conservative nest. You see it in his foreign policy—his studious friendliness towards Poland until Poland's turn should come, and that was not until the swallowing of Austria had laid the flank of Czecho-Slovakia bare, and Czecho-Slovakia itself (in two gulps, this time) had been thoroughly assimilated. You see it, equally, in the Nazi encroachment on the Christian faith; above all in the Nazi encroachment on the privileges of the Catholic Church, which is the subject of this study.

The wedge-driving method has this obvious advantage—that you are continually playing off two

human temperaments against each other. There is a temperament which is for resisting the first sign of aggression, yielding no inch to the suspected enemy, for fear he should take an ell; in a word, the temperament which is convinced that wedges have thin ends. There is another, more peaceful temperament which urges, "No, not yet; it would be an error to take our stand on such flimsy provocation as this; throw a sop to the wolves, in the hope that it may suffice them; wait until the situation becomes really intolerable before you strike." This latter temperament is for ever selling the pass, slope by slope, to the enemy. Where the foreign policy of the Reich was concerned, most of us have had illusions which time was destined to shatter; this is not the hour for recriminations. Just so, in his dealings with the Catholic Church, Hitler has continually taken advantage of those moderating counsels which have urged concessions in this crisis or that. He has played off the Innitzers against the Faulhabers.

Whether this kind of piecemeal aggression is due to a subtle, calculated policy, or whether the Third Reich is led on from one encroachment to another as the vistas of possible self-aggrandizement open successively to its view, there is no need here to determine. Some represent Hitler as a chess-player of consummate skill, who has thought out all his moves a full decade ahead. Others regard him as an illuminist who acts upon the instinct of the moment, so that it is never possible to prophesy what he will do next—a view which has become especially popular with those whose duty it is to guess what he will do next. But in truth Hitler is not an ogre, he

is a human being; and probably, like most of us, he lets forethought and opportunism wait upon each other; in shaping events, he allows events to shape him. I doubt if he has, personally, such bitter feelings towards the Catholic Church as many of those who have persecuted her; in the old days when he fought against Communism, I doubt if he realised that he would be concerned, one day, to combat her influence. But the logic of his own immoderate aims has driven him to it.

Before the Führer

In fairness to both sides, something must be remembered which is customarily forgotten,¹ that the conflict between Nazism and the Church began before the Nazis came into power. In 1931, the Bavarian bishops issued a declaration which protested against the movement's racial doctrine, its attitude towards the Bible, and certain other aspects of its religious code. Priests were forbidden to take any part in it, and active members of it were to be denied the Sacraments. This did not prevent many Catholics from voting for the party at the crucial election; already the meet-them-half-way temperament had begun to assert itself; and, after all, anything was better than Communism. But friction between the official representatives of the Church and the official doctrines of the party had been, thus early, foreshadowed. It is also fair to remember that the Nazis, on their side, professed no love for

¹ See Michael Power, *Religion in the Reich*, pp. 12 sqq.

the Church; there was no treachery, in this instance, about their approach. Nobody expected that the thin end of the wedge would be exactly a burglar's jemmy; but the householder had every reason to be on his guard, and not suffer his house to be broken up.

Germany went totalitarian in 1933. It was no matter for surprise that, in the course of that operation, the Centre party should have disappeared. All parties were merged in the Party, and the Centre, which for so many decades had been the rallying-ground of moderate opinion, swinging to right or left as a pendulum was needed to redress the balance of the political machine, was the last kind of interference which would be welcomed by a Government pledged to desperate expedients. The gradual throttling of the Catholic Press, which was only completed in 1935,¹ might also have been expected; the totalitarian Government does not tolerate criticism, from whatever quarter, any more than it tolerates independent political action. So far, a grave wrong had been done, but it was a wrong done to democracy in general, not to the Catholic Church as such. All that had passed so far was only the preliminary to an assault.

It was understood, of course, to be the exact opposite. Before we condemn the compliance or the short-sightedness of those Catholics who helped, in spite of episcopal warnings, to vote Hitler into power, we must try to understand, as it is not easy for us to understand, the attitude of mind in which those who accept (without welcoming) a totalitarian Government strike the balance between their gains

¹ See Edmond Vermeil, *Hitler et la Christianisme*, p. 61.

and their losses. The thing, it seems to them, has got to come; it is the only way in which the country can be pulled together, or it is the only way of avoiding bloodshed and constant friction; our political liberties must go; what remains to us? Our personal liberties, at least; a totalitarian regime can have no reason to grudge us those.

Political and Personal Liberty

It is to be remembered that political liberty and personal liberty are not the same thing; if you belong to a minority in a country where matters are decided by the counting of heads, your personal liberty may be drastically curtailed. And this applies not only to the individual (as when a majority of your fellow-citizens determines to enforce prohibition laws), but to voluntary associations within the State, and above all to religious bodies. The Catholic Church, in particular, has had much to suffer from the democracies. Where she is in a minority, statesmen will often forbid her the liberty of teaching, or of public action, precisely for fear that the minority may grow into a majority, to the detriment of their own rival culture. In Germany, her position had been threatened by State Lutheranism on one side, by international Socialism on the other. Amid the tangle of political parties, German Catholics had been driven, unwillingly, to organise a political party of their own; it had seemed the only way of defending their personal liberty. When all the parties disappeared, the Centre with the rest, it looked as if

personal liberty might be secured for the Church as the price of her political renunciation.

The new men who had come into power professed to be indifferent over the rival claims of Catholic and Reformed theology; international Socialism was their professed enemy. Was it not reasonable to hope that Catholics would be left to live their own lives, undisturbed by the threat of State interference?

Nor was this merely an *a priori* expectation; there was an obvious parallel to be drawn from the situation in Italy. Events have moved so rapidly that it is difficult to carry our minds back to the state of things which existed less than ten years ago, when all Europe saw in Hitler a mere imitator of Mussolini. Mussolini, like Hitler, was a Catholic who had given up, so far as was known, the practice of his religion; there was no reason to think that he loved the Church. But, from the moment when the Partito Popolare was dissolved, he seemed clearly anxious to delimit the spheres of God and Cæsar with accuracy, and abide by the delimitation. Why should not Hitler do the same? Catholic sentiment, in Germany as in Italy, was a useful bulwark against Communism; it was expedient for him, surely, to keep on the right side of it, even if it were true that a few extremists in the Nazi Party were trying to float a religion of their own.

The Concordat

This, at least, seems to have been the feeling in Rome, whatever misgivings German Catholics them-

selves may have entertained. The result was the Concordat signed in July, 1933, between the Holy See and the new government of the Reich. It was a diplomatic triumph for Hitler¹, and was interpreted in the world at large as expressing a measure of agreement between the ecclesiastical and the civil authorities which never in fact existed. Popular ignorance imagines that a Concordat is only drawn up where a country is on especially friendly terms with Rome. This is the precise opposite of the fact; a country which was on ideally good terms with Rome would not need to have a Concordat at all; and the existence of such a document implies that the two signatory parties are, in a more or less degree, distrustful of each other's intentions. It is an attempt to regularise a difficult situation by tying down either party, on paper, to a minimum of good behaviour. In July, 1933, the situation was not that Pope Pius XI believed Hitler would treat the Church well; he may have hoped that it would be so, and that a document formally attested would have some effect on Hitler's policy; but if there had been no distrust, there would have been no Concordat. Nothing could be more absurd than to represent the transaction as if it meant that the New Germany and the Vatican were working hand in glove.

Two clauses in the agreement safeguarded the interests of Cæsar. Each bishop on his appointment was to take an oath of loyalty to the German State; and the Holy See undertook that the clergy

¹ "By the signature of the Concordat, National Socialism has been recognised by the Catholic Church in the most solemn manner possible."—*Völkischer Beobachter*, July 24, 1933.

should not belong to, or further the objects of, any political party. In return for this, the German Government promised, with almost suspicious alacrity, complete freedom to the Catholic schools, and to associations of Catholics for purposes other than political; meanwhile associations which were sponsored by the State should not interfere with the religious life, or form the religious conscience, of Catholic children and young people. In a word, the Church would never have to regret her action in allowing the Centre party to be liquidated; the privileges for which that party was prepared to fight should be hers without the necessity of fighting.

Six Days Later . . .

"Six days after the signing of the Concordat, the State duly promulgated the Sterilisation Law, which gave powers for sterilisation, by force, even of the blind."¹ Suddenness is a recognised part of the Nazi technique: the moving of a piece on some quite different part of the board, to make your opponent wonder how this move is connected with the one before, or whether it is connected at all. In this case, it can hardly have been an accident that the new rulers of the Reich proceeded so quickly from an instrument of peace with the Catholic authorities to a legislative act so repulsive to Catholic principles.

There is no need to consider here the ethical implications of the measure. We are concerned with

¹ Power, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

it, not as an act of persecution, but as an act of provocation. This, surely, was its immediate purpose. It was the thick end of the wedge, this time, thrust in to open the door for that crusade of race and force which has been the chief characteristic of the Nazi philosophy. Catholics were to realise, without loss of time, that the regime which had gained respectability by the signing of the Concordat intended to flout the convictions, not only of all Catholics, but of all Christians in Europe. It was clear provocation; why was it important that the provocation should come so soon? 824-93 672

For this reason above all—that the rulers of Germany wanted to make it appear, from the first, as if the Concordat had been broken on the Catholic side. A few pulpit declamations against the new law—and who could doubt that they would be forthcoming?—would lend colour to the claim that the bishops were not observing their pledge to support the Reich; after that, it would be possible to drive a coach and four through the Concordat and still maintain that you were not the aggressor. The Nazi technique never neglects propaganda. Very little colour may be needed to justify its actions before a public which only knows what it is allowed to hear, and is not encouraged to comment even on that. But always *some* colour must be found to excuse even its most flagrant performances. And whenever Nazi propaganda is taxed with persecution of the Church, its reply is always the same—~~that the Catholics began~~ **C. C. L. ASHOKNAGARI, YD.** by refusing to keep “politics” out of the pulpit. Actually, it was not till Cardinal Faulhaber preached his Advent course at the end of this same year, 1933,

that a kind of official challenge was thrown down by the Church to the Nazi philosophy. But it was soon enough.

The year 1934 saw only the beginnings of that forward drive by which the Nazi culture, with Rosenberg at its head, aimed at filching from the Church the loyalty of youth. The reason for this was plain; at the end of that year a plebiscite was to be held in the Saar district, which would decide for or against its reincorporation in the Reich. Catholic influence in the Saar was strong; it would not do to let the Nazi State appear as the open enemy of the Church. As the youth organisations of Catholic Germany began to disappear, Hitler "received Cardinal Schulte and gave him verbally his promise that the rights of Catholics would be protected, and no article of the Concordat infringed."¹ Unconvinced, the bishops wrote a joint pastoral at their yearly meeting at Fulda, expressing their anxiety over the turn things were taking. It was confiscated by the Gestapo, and the faithful never saw or heard it.

The Oath of Loyalty

In a sense, the Concordat between the Reich and the Holy See was based on a fundamental misunderstanding. Pope Pius, in agreeing that the bishops should take an oath of loyalty to the German State, obviously did not intend anything more than a recognition of the German Government as the

¹ Power, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

constituted government of the country. Catholic bishops might swear loyalty to it in the same sense in which Anglican bishops swear loyalty to his Majesty the King, without thereby binding themselves to accept, without protest, every step which the Government might, from time to time, choose to take. They agreed, further, that they would not attempt to resuscitate the Centre party, in a country where parties had ceased to exist; that they would restrain their clergy from indulging in party activities. Was this to preclude bishops and clergy alike from protesting, even in sermons, against a pagan philosophy which the State was encouraging, against scurrilous attacks on religion in the party newspapers, against invasions of the Church's own rights, now apparently guaranteed to her? No reasonable political theory would admit such a conclusion. But the Nazi doctrine of the State construes all criticism of the Government and its measures as *lèse-majesté*; you must accept everything in silence, or you are accused at once of political activity. Thus it may be said that the two signatories of the Concordat were not using terms in the same sense.

But, if so, the blame lies unquestionably at the door of the German rulers. They knew that they were coining a new language. Bishops and priests were to honour the constitutional government, and avoid acts which might endanger the welfare of the State—supposing that the French bishops had made a similar undertaking, would anyone in his senses have interpreted it as meaning a reverential silence in the face of any decree which the French Chamber might enact? You must not attach new senses to

words, and then employ those words in drawing up a contract with a second party who does not share your vocabulary. Nor can Hitler have imagined for a moment that Pope Pius was signing the formula in that sense. No religious body could conceivably sign away, on a blank cheque, all its rights of criticism and of protest. The sixteenth and thirty-second clauses of the Concordat were face-saving clauses, to be used if and when it should become necessary to declare that the Concordat was a dead letter.

Next the Schools

The Saar plebiscite was taken at the beginning of 1935, with an intoxicating success for the cause of greater Germany. Once more shock-tactics were applied; fifteen days later "the official Bavarian Press opened fire on the Confessional schools".¹ If a propaganda of mixed cajolery and intimidation could produce such results in a district which was only German by anticipation, what might it not do in a province which was already part of Germany? Goebbels brought all his batteries to bear on the public mind. "He who sends his child to the denominational school wrongs his child, and interferes with the unity of the people. We do not want Catholic or Evangelical schools, we want the school of Adolf Hitler." Such were the slogans which were posted up everywhere, and an intensive Press campaign followed up the posters. The effect was that in this year only sixty-five per cent. of the Bavarian

¹ Power, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

electorate voted in favour of the confessional schools, against eighty-nine per cent. in 1933.

So far the success of the agitation, however lamentable, was not wholly unexpected. There will always be weaker brethren among the Catholic population, even of a traditionally Catholic country. There will be those who complain that the priests are too anxious to keep everything in their own hands; after all, it is possible to bring up your children as Catholics without sending them to exclusively Catholic schools. Hours were set apart for religious teaching in the provided schools (as we should call them), and priests had the right of entry. Was it not doing the fair thing by one's children to give them the opportunities of advancement which were opened to them by being educated on the State model? Already it was clear that you had to be a good Nazi to get anywhere; it was not yet clear that it was impossible to be a good Catholic and a good Nazi at the same time; Rosenberg's eccentricities were not the established religion of Germany. Sixty-five per cent. is as much as the Church can ordinarily count upon in the way of out-and-out supporters, where there is a conflict between the voice of ecclesiastical and civil authorities. If the thing had stopped there, the Church might legitimately have complained that the State had grossly exceeded its powers by adopting a violently partisan policy in an issue where it should have remained neutral; that pressure had been exerted in defiance of the spirit in which the Concordat had been signed; but it would have had to be admitted that the human weakness of the weaker brethren had been to blame in selling the pass to the enemy.

But the thing did not stop there. A fresh vote was taken in 1936, after more propaganda, and the number of parents who voted for the confessional schools had been reduced to thirty-five per cent.; another in 1937, and now the faithful remnant was reduced to four per cent. This speeding up of the tempo was frankly inartistic; an offence, not merely against justice, but against the law of averages. You cannot, by legitimate means, break down the resistance of a people so rapidly as that. A statistical triumph of this kind only serves to raise the suspicion that there has been manipulation of the votes. If there has not been manipulation of the votes, there must have been intimidation on a reckless scale to account for such a turn-over. What is quite certain is that you have not taken a free vote.

Bullied into Submission

It is not relevant here to consider whether the Catholics in Bavaria and in other parts of the Reich (for these others fared no better) might not have shown a stronger front to the oppressor, and let their schools go down fighting, instead of being jockeyed into a show of acquiescence. Persecution is none the less persecution when it is successful. What chiefly unnerved resistance was probably the feeling that resistance would necessarily be in vain. It was quite clear, from the way in which education was being handled, that the Government was determined to get rid of the denominational schools, and many may have felt that it was better to let them have

their way, for fear that they should make all Catholic education, even in the provided schools, impossible. What is quite certain is that the Nazis, by the constant threats to personal liberty which the Gestapo and the rubber truncheon secure, tyrannised over the consciences of the German Catholics, bullied them into submission without persuading them; and it is there that the essence of persecution lies. Indeed, it would have been more honest if the State had simply taken over the schools by open confiscation, instead of trying to persuade the world that their abandonment had been voluntary. Probably it is impossible for anyone who has breathed the air of a free country to realise the numbing effect which the new form of persecution has on those who are subjected to it: the shrieking of the Press, the fear of spying, of mock justice, of the concentration camp; above all, the impossibility of free discussion and open exchange of ideas. We have to remember, besides, that the wedge method always makes compliance with the Government demands something less than a sacrifice of absolute principle; religion was taught, and is still taught, in the State schools where the parents demand it.

It need hardly be said that any argument for compliance which was based on the existence of "facilities" in the State schools was ill-founded. The wedge system was still at work; having, by 1937, obliterated the confessional schools, the Government proceeded, in 1938, to issue further legislation which was designed to take the sting out of all religious teaching everywhere. Lay teachers were allowed to do the work hitherto reserved for priests; priests

were no longer to teach unless they could "guarantee that nothing in their religious classes would contradict the world-view of National-Socialism", and so on.¹ But indeed, no amount of facilities could suffice to counteract the Nazi atmosphere, the Nazi teaching. It is not as if you could go to school with the Nazis and acquire mere knowledge of facts, mere principles of taste and of criticism, such as a secular education would impart. The aim of the Nazis has been, from the first, to capture the imagination and the loyalties of youth; and to capture these for a perverted, though carefully elaborated, world-view. There is no room in the same child's head for the principles of Christianity, however languidly acquired, and for the racial ideology which has Hitler as its rule of faith, and the world-domination of the German race as its end.

The Hitler Youth

So much for the guarantee given by the Concordat that the Catholic schools should be allowed to continue. Too scrupulous to abolish them, the German Government had forced the Catholic public to declare them unnecessary. But it is not only during school hours that the totalitarian State employs the time, and forms the character, of the young: it will manage their leisure for them. Here is a piteous reflection for anybody who has lived out half a century in this crooked world. There was an officer in the Boer War who distinguished himself by successfully defending an outpost of British resistance, which caught the

¹ Power, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

public attention and the public fancy. His gallant services won him a well-merited reputation among his fellow-countrymen, and he determined to make good use of it. As Lord Baden-Powell, he organised and still directs the vast Boy Scout movement which counts its adherents in every corner of the earth. His calculation was that by the use of a little drill, a little uniform, and a great deal of comradeship, group discipline, and outdoor adventure, you could help in bringing up a generation of good citizens, of kindly and courageous men and women, perhaps even of loyal Christians. People might make fun of the methods by which the movement sought to capture the imagination of boyhood, totem-symbols and catchwords and all the rest of it, but nobody could quarrel with its aims, which were wholly patriotic and humanitarian, unless he were short-sighted enough to imagine that the need for patriotism could vanish overnight. England, once more, had shown an example to the world.

Corruptio optimi pessima; the example proved to be a fatal one. The peaceful thunders of Olympus have been stolen by the Titans; the model on which, it seemed, international brotherhood and universal good will were to dawn upon the world has been the model on which the new totalitarian States have built up the foundations of a contemptuous and unscrupulous nationalism. . . . It is a poignant reflection that Lord Baden-Powell, not many years since, was refused permission to land in Denmark because, as Chief Scout, he was wearing "uniform". In so far as it was his object to build up a healthy, resourceful, outdoors generation of boys, totalitarianism has

faithfully imitated his ambitions. In so far as his design was to build up a generation which should fearlessly speak the truth, should help the weak, should show kindness to all its fellow-men, totalitarianism has borrowed his methods and warped them to the service of ideals miserably other than his own. To catch the boy out of school hours, to captivate his fancy with heroic legend, to discipline his outlook by catch-words and by community song—all that has been borrowed by the Nazis to build up a race pagan in morals, obedient to the hive-instinct of the new Germany, ferociously intolerant of all other cultures, worshipping nothing except brute strength.

Can the fountain of youth be so poisoned at its source? Will the dragooning of young Germans into Nazi ideals be a success, or will it breed, as intensive education sometimes does breed, a reaction? It is too early yet to say; the Nazi experiment is comparatively young; perhaps there will be a reversal in human fortunes which will leave historians permanently wondering whether the scheme would have worked. Meanwhile, it is certain that the institution of the Hitler-youth, and the desire to make it the only youth-movement in the Reich, led to inevitable conflict between Nazism and the Church. In a sense, it may be said that German Catholicism invited attack by the very excellence of its organisation. It had founded a political party—that party must go. It had an admirable network of schools, religious and secular—those schools must be denuded of their pupils. It was rich in youth movements, some of them affiliated to the Boy Scouts,

some of them local and national—those movements must be engulfed in the single, all-assimilating corporation of the Hitler-youth.

The Concordat Defied

Once more, the Concordat had to be defied. By Article 31, it was laid down that, "Such Catholic organisations and associations as serve a purely religious, cultural, or charitable purpose, and as such are subject to the Church authorities, will be protected in their establishments and activities."¹ Religious associations may be of three kinds. Some of them will be frankly political in their aims and methods, like the Centre or the Partito Popolare. Some will confine their activities to the sacristy: pious sodalities which meet for prayer and mutual edification. Between these two extremes you have a no-man's-land of promiscuous organisations which are covered, roughly, by the definition "cultural and charitable". The Nazi Government, it hardly needs to be said, lost no time in annexing the no-man's land. Either they would stretch the law so as to include these organisations under the term "political"; or they would simply merge them, in the name of efficiency, with non-religious organisations of their own. And, above all, the youth movements.

Baldur von Schirach, the head of the Hitler-youth, declared war against the Catholic organisations as early as March, 1934, when he told his

¹ Power, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

audiences at Essen that "sport had nothing to do with religious beliefs", and the Catholic Jugendverbände were gravely mistaken if they thought they could retain "their political power" in a country which now had only one political orientation.¹ They held out bravely as long as it was possible to hold out. Two thousand German boy scouts went to Rome for the Holy Year in 1935. "On their return . . . they were set upon at Constance by the secret police. Their cameras, rucksacks, rosaries, musical instruments, souvenirs of Rome—everything they had with them was confiscated. Their shirts were torn off their backs. They did not see their belongings again."² The struggle could not be maintained; the strength of an association is its weakness—by a single decree you can disband it or merge it in some parallel but wholly dissimilar organisation. In 1938, practically all the Catholic Jugendverbände were dissolved, and now the Hitler-youth is a necessary element in the training of every German. From this, it need hardly be said, every religious influence is jealously excluded.

"Enemies of the State"

It must not be supposed that this campaign for the destruction of religion was carried out with no other grounds to recommend it than the *Sic volo, sic jubeo* of the new Government. The Nazi technique always employs publicity (an art which it has studied intensively) to aid its onslaughts, just as it employs

¹ Vermeil, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

² Power, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

parachute troops to undermine the enemy's defences in military attack. Somehow the Catholics must be made to look as if they were the enemies of the State. Nothing would secure this more effectively than a series of legal condemnations; a legal condemnation, even in a country which has witnessed the Alice-in-Wonderland procedure of the Reichstag trial, carries with it a flavour of impartiality. And here the Nazis were in luck; it was not necessary for them to invent a law which Catholics would be certain to break, since the exigencies of their position called, quite legitimately, for currency regulations which Catholics did break.

Early in the regime, in order to secure the stability of the currency, a veto was imposed on the export of German money to foreign countries. Special exemption was granted to business firms which owed money abroad, none to individuals or to charitable organisations. Now, when the mark fell, under the Weimar Government, many religious Orders had borrowed money from their foreign houses.¹ They had no exports with which to repay these loans; they could only repay them in money by smuggling. Conscience thus presented them with rival claims; but, whereas the repayment of the loans was a moral duty, the law forbidding the export of money was only a penal law, and could therefore be infringed if you did so at your own risk, and were prepared to face the consequences. From the point of view of Catholic propaganda, it would have been very much better if the debtors had defaulted, pleading the impossibility of carrying out their contract. But it is not

¹ Vermeil, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

surprising that they should have preferred the honest to the legal solution. That they should be punished was not unreasonable; that they should be savagely punished was not unexpected. The malice which lay behind these prosecutions showed itself in a more subtle way; it has been pointed out¹ that the Nazi authorities deliberately spread these trials over a period of months taking them roughly at the rate of one a week, so as to keep them continually before the public eye, and give the impression that "the Catholic Orders had no other occupation than the smuggling of German currency."

Charges of Immorality

It seems to be generally admitted, however, that the staging of these prosecutions was not very effective in discrediting the Church. Early in 1937, a fresh attempt was made; this time the appeal was made to that large class of newspaper readers which delights in filthy revelations, and the character of the charges brought was such as to harden public opinion against the Catholic cause in the Schools question, which was then at its height. Some Franciscan lay-brothers, who had charge of mentally deficient children, were accused and found guilty of unnatural offences against those who were under their care. What truth there may have been in the allegations will, perhaps, never be known. There are black sheep here and there, no doubt, in the fold of St. Francis no less than else-

¹ Power, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

where, and some of the accused may have been guilty. But it is to be remembered that the judges, officials in a Nazi country, were predisposed to credulity; it is to be remembered that the witnesses were, in the nature of the case, half-witted (one thinks of Van der Lubbe and his rôle in the Reichstag trial); it is to be remembered that abnormally constituted persons are notoriously subject to hallucinations in the matter of sex. In the case immediately under consideration, most of us will be content to suspend judgment.

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But the handling of the affair by the authorities has, perhaps, no parallel in history. The whole of the controlled Press fed its pornographically-minded readers with revolting details, blazoned in its headlines, and promised them that this was only the beginning of a series of prosecutions, which would find no less than a thousand priests and nuns guilty of immoral conduct. In pursuance of this object, a great hunt was made for clerical delinquents in a society honey-combed with informers. Offenders who had already been found guilty and punished by ecclesiastical superiors were dragged to light. The effect was to show that a mountain had been made out of a molehill. The prosecutors succeeded in obtaining convictions against fifty-eight priests, out of a total of 25,000 priests in the Reich, and no nuns at all. The public must have realised, in spite of the gagging of the Catholic Press, that the whole business was a fiasco. Yet everyone who knows how mud sticks, how minds are impressed by insinuation rather than by proved fact, will be able to form some idea of the discredit brought

upon the Church by this organised campaign of vilification.¹

“No Quarrel”

It is maintained by the Nazis, and by those who seek to excuse their conduct, that they have no quarrel with the Church as such—have they not left Catholics freedom of worship? Do not their places of worship remain open, and crowded?—but only with the Church’s attempt to stake out a claim on the loyalties and enthusiasms of youth. Youth belongs to the nation, must be formed on a national model; it was necessary, therefore, to loosen the Church’s hold on the nation’s children, whether in school hours or out of them. That done, the Government of the Reich has no further quarrel with the priests; let them say Mass and conduct prayers and mind their own business.

It would be difficult, in any case, to accept this account of the matter. We should be disposed to ask why the Press and the minor leaders of the party have conducted a campaign of abuse against Catholicism for the last seven years; why it has been necessary to send more than five thousand priests to prison. Can we really be sure that we have seen the worst of State interference, that there is no more to come? In Germany itself, doubtless it was better not to risk a frontal attack; Catholicism numbers its millions. But if we want to understand the real Nazi attitude towards religion, we may be pardoned for

¹ Power, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

devoting some attention to the treatment given to Catholics in other countries, which have come under the Reich's domination unwillingly.

Naked Persecution

When Austria came into the orbit of the German Reich, she was treated almost as a conquered country. The Catholic schools were all closed down without the formality of a vote, without any barrage of propaganda. Religious instruction remains in the State school where parents demand it, but it is mostly given by teachers fully imbued with Nazi ideals. What has befallen the German Catholics over a course of years befell the Austrian Catholics overnight. Still, they are allowed freedom of worship, like their co-religionists in Germany; they have not yet found themselves members of a proscribed fraternity.

In Poland it is otherwise; there, naked persecution has reigned ever since the conquest. That priests have been butchered everywhere in the course of mass executions does not, perhaps, belong to the story of persecution proper; the reason there is a war of cultures rather than of religions. It has been the German policy to choose as victims, when victims must be chosen, the intellectual and cultural leaders of Poland; that many of these should be priests is only to be expected. I am not suggesting that this is an extenuating circumstance; I am only pointing out that it does not necessarily imply hostility to the Catholic religion as such, or to the Christian religion as such. If Poland had been a Mahommedan country,

it may be surmised that the officials of religion would have suffered equally.

What is more significant for our present purpose, because it seems to be an index of the general Nazi attitude towards Catholicism, is the wholesale closing of churches, the wholesale imprisonment or expulsion of the clergy. That is difficult to explain on merely cultural grounds. It is true that in Poland, as in Ireland, religion and patriotism are close bed-fellows. And you might have expected that the clergy in a conquered Poland would be subjected to irritating restrictions; that they would be watched by the police, that their sermons would be reported, the bishops' pastorals censored or suppressed; Polish Catholicism might reasonably be feared as a rallying-point for Polish national sentiment. But that does not account for what has happened.

"The Catholic churches in Poland were closed as from the beginning of November. The faithful of Poznan can attend Mass only on Sunday. . . . The administration of the diocese of Chelmo, embracing the whole of Pomerania, though not dissolved, is not allowed to function. The same applies to the administration of the diocese of Silesia, in Katowice, and that of the diocese of Kujawy, in Wlocawek. . . . The majority of the clergy of the above-mentioned dioceses are either in prison or interned in their own houses. In Poznan alone, over a hundred priests are imprisoned. . . . In the diocese of Chelmo alone, six hundred priests have been either imprisoned or interned in concentration camps."¹ "All the

¹ *German Atrocities in Poland* (Free Europe pamphlet), p. 34.

priests from the parishes of the Gniewkow deanery (sixteen in all), of the Lobzenica deanery (twelve), of the Naklo deanery (sixteen), and of the Znin deanery (twenty-one) were expelled. . . . Of the 261 parishes in the Gniezno archdiocese, more than half have been deprived of their shepherds.”¹ Dull statistics like these, which have little atrocity-value, are perhaps the surest index of German intentions in Poland; religion is to be starved out. And this, not because the conquerors of Poland could serve any useful end by turning the Poles into a so-called virile nation; who in Germany wants to do that? The conclusion is irresistible that Nazi Germany, where it is not controlled by consideration of prudence, is bent on the destruction of Christianity as such.

Two Types of Persecution

It is our duty, always, to make some attempt at understanding those who disagree with us. And those who persecute the Church do so, commonly, not because they hate her in herself but because they identify her, obstinately, with something other which they hate. Two types of persecution may be easily distinguished by the colour they take from their historical context. There is persecution in the name of national security; where the rulers of a State, commonly of an aristocratic State, identify, or profess to identify, the Church with a foreign culture, suspect it, or profess to suspect it, of anti-national, because of its international, sympathies.

¹ English Catholic Newsletter, No. 15.

The clergy, however strong and manifest be their patriotism, are regarded as foreigners because they are in relations with their co-religionists abroad, because some of them have been educated abroad; they cannot be hundred-per-cent. citizens of their own country. So it was in old days when Catholics were persecuted in England: so it was in Germany at the time of the *Kulturkampf*. And there is persecution in the name of popular liberty; where the partisans of a democratic revolution, in their eagerness to sweep away all the landmarks of the bad past, profess to find in the Church, and especially in her hierarchy, a relic of the older order which must be swept away with the rest; of course the clergy are the enemies of revolution, or how was it that all went well with them in the days before the revolution? So once more, though on quite different grounds, the Church is persecuted.

The Nazi movement has, perhaps, both reasons for quarrelling with Catholic influence in the Reich. For, on the one hand, the German Catholics are bound by strong ties to Catholics in other parts of the world, and the Nazi State distrusts all such outside affiliations. And on the other hand, Hitler's revolution, although we used to think of it as a conservative revolution because it was anti-Communist, has proved, in fact, a break with the past hardly less radical than Lenin's. Whether because they remind him that there are cultures other than the German culture, or because they remind him that there was a pre-Nazi Germany, Hitler might be expected to view the Catholics of the Reich with distrust, and perhaps to harass them.

But does either motive account for the vigour, the purposefulness, of the anti-Catholic drive? The Catholics of Bavaria, and perhaps of the Rhineland, might be suspected of sympathy with the old order of things; but not those of Prussia and of the other German States. There, you feel, the Lutherans might have been persecuted (as we know they have been persecuted), and the Catholics let alone; yet the suppression of Catholic influence has been nationwide. Nor, when you come to look into it, was there much in the cry of "Foreign influence!" The German Catholics had no love for France; they remembered the anti-clerical laws, and they blamed France for the ill-success of Brüning's Chancellorship. Russia they hated, like the Nazis; Italy, Germany's new friend, was endeared to them by the aid which it lent to the anti-Communist rising of General Franco. There was no reason in the nature of things why the new German Government should not have pulled well with the Church at first, if there had not been some more intimate ground of disagreement.

A War on Christianity

The fact is, unless all the symptoms of the struggle have wholly misled us, that for once the Church is being persecuted not because she is Catholic but because she is Christian. Wherever else we point to anti-clerical legislation, and denounce it, our non-Catholic friends are not slow to retort that the Church has invited attack by being untrue to the spirit of her Master. But not in Germany; there it is precisely

because she is true to the spirit of her Master that she is held up to scorn. She has loved righteousness and hated iniquity; therefore she is in exile. Many of the Church's persecutors would have been moved to compunction, or at least to indignant disavowal, if they had had St. Paul's experience; if it had been said to them in a vision, "I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest". To a German statesman, it would be no news.

It is as if the mantle of the centuries had slipped away, and Christendom were faced with the prospect of converting the world afresh. May we be found worthy of the task; it is no light one.

